

History of the Americas

The human **history of the Americas** is thought to begin with people migrating to these areas from Asia during the height of an [ice age](#). These groups are generally believed to have been isolated from the people of the "[Old World](#)" until the coming of Europeans in 1492 with the [voyages of Christopher Columbus](#).



A true-color image of the [Americas](#). Via Much of the information in the image comes from a single remote-sensing device—[NASA's Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer](#), or MODIS, flying over 700 km above the Earth on board the [Terra satellite](#) in 2001.

The ancestors of today's [American Indigenous peoples](#) were the [Paleo-Indians](#); they were [hunter-gatherers](#) who migrated into North America. The most popular theory asserts that migrants came to the [Americas](#) via [Beringia](#), the land mass now covered by the ocean waters of the [Bering Strait](#). Small [lithic stage](#) peoples followed [megafauna](#) like bison, mammoth (now extinct), and caribou, thus gaining the modern nickname "big-game hunters." Groups of people may also have traveled into North America on shelf or sheet ice along the northern Pacific coast.

Sedentary societies developed primarily in two regions: [Mesoamerica](#) and the [Andean civilizations](#). Mesoamerican cultures include [Zapotec](#), [Toltec](#), [Olmec](#), [Maya](#), [Aztec](#), [Mixtec](#), [Totonac](#), [Teotihuacan](#), [Huastec people](#), [Purépecha](#), [Izapa](#) and [Mazatec](#).^[1] Andean cultures include [Inca](#), [Caral-Supe](#), [Wari](#), [Tiwanaku](#), [Chimor](#), [Moche](#), [Muisca](#), [Chavin](#), [Paracas](#), and [Nazca](#).

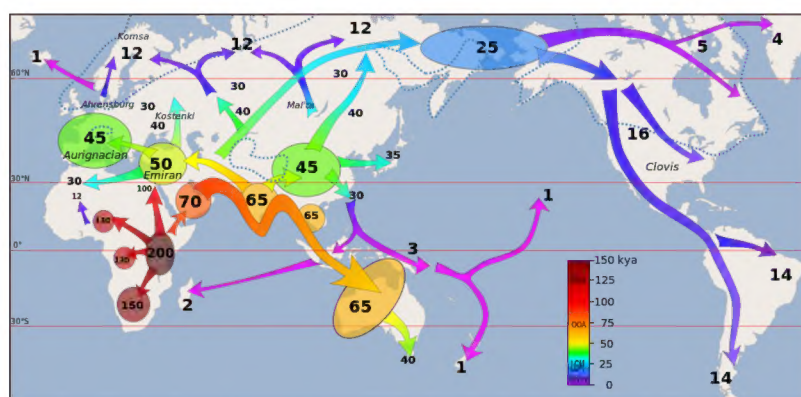
After the [voyages of Christopher Columbus](#) in 1492, [Spanish](#) and later [Portuguese](#), [English](#), [French](#) and [Dutch](#) colonial expeditions arrived in the New World, [conquering and settling](#) the

discovered lands, which led to a transformation of the cultural and physical landscape in the Americas. Spain colonized most of the Americas from present-day [Southwestern United States](#), Florida and the [Caribbean](#) to the southern tip of South America. Portugal settled in what is mostly present-day [Brazil](#) while England established colonies on the Eastern coast of the United States, as well as the [North Pacific coast](#) and in most of Canada. France settled in [Quebec](#) and other parts of Eastern Canada and claimed an area in what is today the central United States. The Netherlands settled New Netherland (administrative centre New Amsterdam – now New York), some Caribbean islands and parts of Northern South America.

European colonization of the Americas led to the rise of new cultures, civilizations and eventually states, which resulted from the fusion of Native American, European, and African traditions, peoples and institutions. The transformation of American cultures through colonization is evident in architecture, religion, gastronomy, the arts and particularly languages, the most widespread being [Spanish](#) (376 million speakers), English (348 million) and [Portuguese](#) (201 million). The colonial period lasted approximately three centuries, from the early 16th to the early 19th centuries, when [Brazil](#) and the larger [Hispanic American](#) nations declared independence. The United States obtained independence from Great Britain much earlier, in 1776, while Canada formed a federal dominion in 1867 and received legal independence in [1931](#). Others remained attached to their European parent state until the end of the 19th century, such as [Cuba](#) and [Puerto Rico](#) which were linked to Spain until 1898. Smaller territories such as [Guyana](#) obtained independence in the mid-20th century, while [French Guiana](#), the [Falkland Islands](#), [Bermuda](#) and several Caribbean islands remain part of a European power to this day.

Pre-colonization

Migration into the continents



Map of [early human migrations](#) based on the [Out of Africa theory](#); figures are in thousands of years ago (kya).^[2]

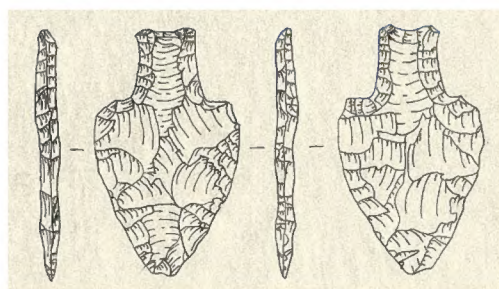
It is believed that the [peopling of the Americas](#) began when [Paleolithic hunter-gatherers](#) ([Paleo-Indians](#)) entered [North America](#) from the [North Asian Mammoth steppe](#) via the [Beringia land bridge](#), which had formed between northeastern [Siberia](#) and western [Alaska](#) due to the lowering

of [sea level](#) during the [Last Glacial Maximum](#) (26,000 to 19,000 years ago).^[3] These populations expanded south of the [Laurentide Ice Sheet](#) and spread rapidly southward, occupying both [North and South America](#) no later than 14,000 years ago, and possibly even before 20,000 years ago.^{[4][5][6][7][8]} The earliest populations in the Americas, before roughly 10,000 years ago, are known as [Paleo-Indians](#). Indigenous peoples of the Americas have been linked to Siberian populations by proposed [linguistic factors](#), the distribution of [blood types](#), and in [genetic composition](#) as reflected by [molecular](#) data, such as [DNA](#).^{[9][10]}

While there is general agreement that the Americas were first settled from Asia, the pattern of migration and the place(s) of origin in Eurasia of the peoples who migrated to the Americas remain unclear.^[5] The traditional theory is that [Ancient Beringians](#) moved when sea levels were significantly lowered due to the [Quaternary glaciation](#),^{[11][12]} following herds of now-extinct [Pleistocene megafauna](#) along *ice-free corridors* that stretched between the [Laurentide](#) and [Cordilleran](#) ice sheets.^[13] Another route proposed is that, either on foot or using [boats](#), they migrated down the Pacific coast to [South America](#) as far as [Chile](#).^[14] Any archaeological evidence of coastal occupation during the last Ice Age would now have been covered by the [sea level rise](#), up to a hundred metres since then.^[15]

The precise date for the peopling of the Americas is a long-standing open question. While advances in [archaeology](#), [Pleistocene geology](#), [physical anthropology](#), and [DNA analysis](#) have progressively shed more light on the subject, significant questions remain unresolved.^{[16][17]} The [Clovis First theory](#) refers to the hypothesis that the [Clovis culture](#) represents the earliest human presence in the Americas about 13,000 years ago.^[18] [Evidence of pre-Clovis cultures has accumulated](#) and pushed back the possible date of the first peopling of the Americas.^{[19][20][21][22]} Academics generally believe that humans reached North America south of the Laurentide Ice Sheet at some point between 15,000 and 20,000 years ago.^{[16][19][23][24][25][26]} Some new controversial archaeological evidence suggests the possibility that human arrival in the Americas may have occurred prior to the [Last Glacial Maximum](#) more than 20,000 years ago.^{[19][27][28][29][30][31]}

Lithic stage (before 8000 BCE)



Stemmed fluted "Fishtail" point found in Belize

The [Lithic stage](#) or [Paleo-Indian period](#), is the earliest classification term referring to the first stage of human habitation in the Americas, covering the [Late Pleistocene](#) epoch. The time period

derives its name from the appearance of "[Lithic flaked](#)" stone tools. [Stone tools](#), particularly [projectile points](#) and [scrapers](#), are the primary evidence of the earliest well known human activity in the [Americas](#). [Lithic reduction](#) stone tools are used by [archaeologists](#) and [anthropologists](#) to classify cultural periods.

Archaic stage (8000–1000 BCE)

Several thousand years after the first migrations, the first complex civilizations arose as hunter-gatherers settled into semi-agricultural communities. Identifiable sedentary settlements began to emerge in the so-called Middle [Archaic period](#) around 6000 BCE. Particular [archaeological cultures](#) can be identified and easily classified throughout the Archaic period.

In the late Archaic, on the north-central coastal region of Peru, a complex civilization arose which has been termed the [Norte Chico civilization](#), also known as Caral-Supe. It is the oldest known civilization in the Americas and one of the [six sites](#) where civilization originated independently and indigenously in the ancient world, flourishing between the 30th and 18th centuries BC. It predated the Mesoamerican [Olmec](#) civilization by nearly two millennia. It was contemporaneous with the Egypt following the unification of its kingdom under [Narmer](#) and the emergence of the first [Egyptian hieroglyphics](#).

Monumental architecture, including earthwork platform mounds and sunken plazas have been identified as part of the civilization. Archaeological evidence points to the use of textile technology and the worship of common god symbols. Government, possibly in the form of theocracy, is assumed to have been required to manage the region. However, numerous questions remain about its organization. In archaeological nomenclature, the culture was pre-ceramic culture of the pre-Columbian Late Archaic period. It appears to have lacked ceramics and art.

Ongoing scholarly debate persists over the extent to which the flourishing of Norte Chico resulted from its abundant maritime food resources, and the relationship that these resources would suggest between coastal and inland sites. The role of seafood in the Norte Chico diet has been a subject of scholarly debate. In 1973, examining the Aspero region of Norte Chico, [Michael E. Moseley](#) contended that a maritime subsistence (seafood) economy had been the basis of society and its early flourishing. This theory, later termed "maritime foundation of Andean Civilization" was at odds with the general scholarly consensus that civilization arose as a result of intensive grain-based agriculture, as had been the case in the emergence of civilizations in northeast Africa (Egypt) and southwest Asia (Mesopotamia).

While earlier research pointed to edible domestic plants such as [squash](#), [beans](#), [lúcuma](#), [guava](#), [pacay](#), and [camote](#) at Caral, publications by Haas and colleagues have added [avocado](#), [achira](#),

and [maize](#) (*Zea Mays*) to the list of foods consumed in the region. In 2013, Haas and colleagues reported that maize was a primary component of the diet throughout the period of 3000 to 1800 BC.^[32] [Cotton](#) was another widespread crop in Norte Chico, essential to the production of fishing nets and textiles. Jonathan Haas noted a mutual dependency, whereby "The prehistoric residents of the Norte Chico needed the fish resources for their protein and the fishermen needed the cotton to make the nets to catch the fish."

In the 2005 book *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, journalist Charles C. Mann surveyed the literature at the time, reporting a date "sometime before 3200 BC, and possibly before 3500 BC" as the beginning date for the formation of Norte Chico. He notes that the earliest date securely associated with a city is 3500 BC, at [Huaricanga](#) in the (inland) Fortaleza area. The Norte Chico civilization began to decline around 1800 BC as more powerful centers appeared to the south and north along its coast, and to the east within the Andes Mountains.

Mesoamerica, the Woodland Period, and Mississippian culture (2000 BCE – 500 CE)



Simple map of subsistence methods in the Americas at 1000 BCE:

- hunter-gatherers
- simple farming societies
- complex farming societies (tribal chiefdoms or civilizations)

After the decline of the Norte Chico civilization, numerous complex civilizations and centralized polities developed in the Western Hemisphere: The [Chavin](#), [Nazca](#), [Moche](#), [Huari](#), [Quitus](#), [Cañaris](#),

Chimu, Pachacamac, Tiahuanaco, Aymara and Inca in the Andes; the Muisca, Tairona, Miskito, Hueta, and Talamanc in the Intermediate Area; the Taínos in the Caribbean; and the Olmecs, Maya, Toltecs, Mixtecs, Zapotecs, Aztecs, Purepecha and Nicoya in Mesoamerica.

The Olmec civilization was the first Mesoamerican civilization, beginning around 1600–1400 BC and ending around 400 BC. Mesoamerica is considered one of the six sites around the globe in which civilization developed independently and indigenously. This civilization is considered the mother culture of the Mesoamerican civilizations. The Mesoamerican calendar, numeral system, writing, and much of the Mesoamerican pantheon seem to have begun with the Olmec.

Some elements of agriculture seem to have been practiced in Mesoamerica quite early. The domestication of maize is thought to have begun around 7,500 to 12,000 years ago. The earliest record of lowland maize cultivation dates to around 5100 BC.^[33] Agriculture continued to be mixed with a hunting-gathering-fishing lifestyle until quite late compared to other regions, but by 2700 BC, Mesoamericans were relying on maize, and living mostly in villages. Temple mounds and classes started to appear. By 1300/1200 BC, small centres coalesced into the Olmec civilization, which seems to have been a set of city-states, united in religious and commercial concerns. The Olmec cities had ceremonial complexes with earth/clay pyramids, palaces, stone monuments, aqueducts and walled plazas. The first of these centers was at San Lorenzo (until 900 BC). La Venta was the last great Olmec centre. Olmec artisans sculpted jade and clay figurines of Jaguars and humans. Their iconic giant heads – believed to be of Olmec rulers – stood in every major city.

The Olmec civilization ended in 400 BC, with the defacing and destruction of San Lorenzo and La Venta, two of the major cities. It nevertheless spawned many other states, most notably the Mayan civilization, whose first cities began appearing around 700–600 BC. Olmec influences continued to appear in many later Mesoamerican civilizations.

Cities of the Aztecs, Mayas, and Incas were as large and organized as the largest in the Old World, with an estimated population of 200,000 to 350,000 in Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec Empire. The market established in the city was said to have been the largest ever seen by the conquistadors when they arrived. The capital of the Cahokians, Cahokia, located near modern East St. Louis, Illinois, may have reached a population of over 20,000. At its peak, between the 12th and 13th centuries, Cahokia may have been the most populous city in North America. Monk's Mound, the major ceremonial center of Cahokia, remains the largest earthen construction of the prehistoric New World.

These civilizations developed agriculture as well, breeding maize (corn) from having ears 2–5 cm in length to perhaps 10–15 cm in length. Potatoes, tomatoes, beans (greens), pumpkins, avocados, and chocolate are now the most popular of the pre-Columbian agricultural products. The civilizations did not develop extensive livestock as there were few suitable species, although

alpacas and llamas were domesticated for use as beasts of burden and sources of wool and meat in the Andes. By the 15th century, maize was being farmed in the Mississippi River Valley after introduction from Mexico. The course of further agricultural development was greatly altered by the arrival of Europeans.

Classic stage (800 BCE – 1533 CE)



Pre-contact: distribution of North American language families, including northern Mexico

Cahokia

Cahokia was a major regional chiefdom, with trade and tributary chiefdoms located in a range of areas from bordering the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico.

Haudenosaune

The Iroquois League of Nations or "People of the Long House", based in present-day upstate and western New York, had a confederacy model from the mid-15th century. It has been suggested that their culture contributed to political thinking during the development of the later United States government. Their system of affiliation was a kind of federation, different from the strong, centralized European monarchies.^{[34][35][36]}

Leadership was restricted to a group of 50 sachem chiefs, each representing one clan within a tribe; the Oneida and Mohawk people had nine seats each; the Onondagas held fourteen; the Cayuga had ten seats; and the Seneca had eight. Representation was not based on population numbers, as the Seneca tribe greatly outnumbered the others. When a sachem chief died, his successor was chosen by the senior woman of his tribe in consultation with other female members of the clan; property and hereditary leadership were passed matrilineally. Decisions were not made through voting but through consensus decision making, with each sachem chief holding theoretical veto power. The Onondaga were the "firekeepers", responsible for raising

topics to be discussed. They occupied one side of a three-sided fire (the Mohawk and Seneca sat on one side of the fire, the Oneida and Cayuga sat on the third side.)^[36]

Long-distance trading did not prevent warfare and displacement among the indigenous peoples, and their oral histories tell of numerous migrations to the historic territories where Europeans encountered them. The Iroquois invaded and attacked tribes in the Ohio River area of present-day Kentucky and claimed the hunting grounds. Historians have placed these events as occurring as early as the 13th century, or in the 17th century [Beaver Wars](#).^[37]

Through warfare, the Iroquois drove several tribes to migrate west to what became known as their historically traditional lands west of the Mississippi River. Tribes originating in the Ohio Valley who moved west included the [Osage](#), [Kaw](#), [Ponca](#) and [Omaha people](#). By the mid-17th century, they had resettled in their historical lands in present-day [Kansas](#), [Nebraska](#), [Arkansas](#) and [Oklahoma](#). The Osage warred with [Caddo](#)-speaking Native Americans, displacing them in turn by the mid-18th century and dominating their new historical territories.^[37]

Oasisamerica

Pueblo people



The Great Kiva of [Chetro Ketl](#) at the [Chaco Culture National Historical Park](#), World Heritage Site



Cliff Palace, [Mesa Verde National Park](#), a World Heritage Site



[Taos Pueblo](#), a World Heritage Site, belonging to a Native American tribe of [Pueblo people](#), marking cultural development during the [Pre-Columbian era](#)



White House Ruins, [Canyon de Chelly National Monument](#)

The [Pueblo people](#) of what is now occupied by the [Southwestern United States](#) and northern [Mexico](#), living conditions were that of large stone apartment like [adobe](#) structures. They live in Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, and possibly surrounding areas.



K'inich Kan B'alam II, the Classic period ruler of Palenque, as depicted on a stela

Aridoamerica

Chichimeca

Chichimeca was the name that the Mexica (Aztecs) generically applied to a wide range of semi-nomadic peoples who inhabited the north of modern-day Mexico, and carried the same sense as the European term "barbarian". The name was adopted with a pejorative tone by the Spaniards when referring especially to the semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer peoples of northern Mexico.

Mesoamerica

Olmec

The Olmec civilization emerged around 1200 BCE in Mesoamerica and ended around 400 BCE. Olmec art and concepts influenced surrounding cultures after their downfall. This civilization was thought to be the first in America to develop a writing system. After the Olmecs abandoned their cities for unknown reasons, the Maya, Zapotec and Teotihuacan arose.

Purepecha

The Purepecha civilization emerged around 1000 CE in Mesoamerica. They flourished from 1100 CE to 1530 CE. They continue to live on in the state of Michoacán. Fierce warriors, they were never conquered and in their glory years, successfully sealed off huge areas from Aztec domination.

Maya

[Maya](#) history spans 3,000 years. The [Classic Maya](#) may have collapsed due to changing climate in the end of the 10th century.

Toltec

The [Toltec](#) were a nomadic people, dating from the 10th–12th century, whose language was also spoken by the Aztecs.

Teotihuacan

[Teotihuacan](#) (4th century BCE – 7/8th century CE) was both a city, and an empire of the same name, which, at its zenith between 150 and the 5th century, covered most of Mesoamerica.

Aztec

The [Aztec](#) having started to build their empire around 14th century found their civilization abruptly ended by the Spanish conquistadors. They lived in Mesoamerica, and surrounding lands. Their capital city Tenochtitlan was one of the largest cities of all time.

South America



Inca Quipu. [Larco Museum Collection](#).

Valdivia culture

The [Valdivia culture](#) is one of the oldest settled cultures recorded in the Americas. It emerged from the earlier [Las Vegas culture](#) and thrived along the coast of [Santa Elena peninsula](#) in [Santa Elena Province](#) of [Ecuador](#) between 3500 BCE and 1500 BCE.

Norte Chico

One of the oldest known civilization of the Americas was established in the [Norte Chico](#) region of modern Peru. Complex society emerged in the group of coastal valleys, between 3000 and 1800 BCE. The [Quipu](#), a distinctive recording device among Andean civilizations, apparently dates from the era of Norte Chico's prominence.

Chavín

The [Chavín](#) established a trade network and developed agriculture by as early as (or late compared to the Old World) 900 BCE according to some estimates and archaeological finds. Artifacts were found at a site called Chavín in modern [Peru](#) at an elevation of 3,177 meters. Chavín civilization spanned from 900 BCE to 300 BCE.

Upano Valley

The [Upano Valley sites](#) in present-day eastern Ecuador predate all known complex Amazonian societies, spanning from approximately 500 BCE to 300-600 CE.^[38]

Inca

Holding their capital at the great city of [Cusco](#), the [Inca civilization](#) dominated the Andes region from 1438 to 1533. Known as *Tawantinsuyu*, or "the land of the four regions", in [Quechua](#), the Inca culture was highly distinct and developed. Cities were built with precise, unmatched stonework, constructed over many levels of mountain terrain. [Terrace farming](#) was a useful form of agriculture. There is evidence of excellent metalwork and even successful [trepanation](#) of the skull in Inca civilization.

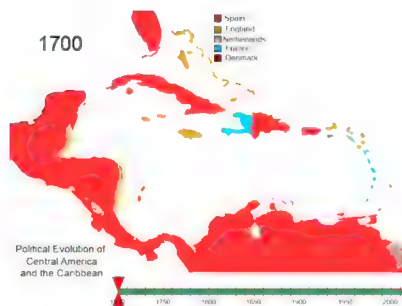
European colonization



[Amerigo Vespucci](#) awakens "America" in a [Stradanus's](#) engraving (c. 1638).



Non-Native American nations' claims over North America, 1750–1999



Political evolution of Central America and the Caribbean since 1700



European nations' control over South America, 1700 to present

Around 1000, the [Vikings](#) established a [short-lived settlement](#) in [Newfoundland](#), now known as [L'Anse aux Meadows](#). [Speculations](#) exist about other Old World discoveries of the New World, but none of these are generally or completely accepted by most scholars.

Spain sponsored a major exploration led by Italian explorer [Christopher Columbus](#) in 1492; it quickly led to extensive [European colonization of the Americas](#). The Europeans brought Old World diseases which are thought to have caused catastrophic epidemics and a huge [decrease](#)

of the native population. Columbus came at a time in which many technical developments in sailing techniques and communication made it possible to report his voyages easily and to spread word of them throughout Europe. It was also a time of growing religious, imperial and economic rivalries that led to a competition for the establishment of colonies.

Colonial period

15th to 19th century colonies in the New World:

- [Spanish colonization of the Americas](#) (1492)
- [Viceroyalty of New Spain](#) (1535–1821)
- [Viceroyalty of Peru](#) (1542–1824)
- [Spanish Main](#)
- [Spanish West Indies](#)
- [Captaincy General of Guatemala](#)
- [British America](#) / [Thirteen Colonies](#) (1584/1607 – 1776/20th century)
- [French Saint-Domingue](#) (1659–1804)
- [Danish West Indies](#)
- [New Netherland](#)
- [New France](#)
- [Captaincy General of Venezuela](#)
- [Portuguese colonization of the Americas](#) (1499–1822)
- [Colonial Brazil](#) (1500–1815)

Decolonization

The formation of sovereign states in the New World began with the [United States Declaration of Independence](#) of 1776. The [American Revolutionary War](#) lasted through the period of the [Siege of Yorktown](#)—its last major campaign—in the early autumn of 1781, with peace being achieved in 1783. In 1804, after the French of [Napoleon Bonaparte](#) were defeated during the [Haitian Revolution](#) under the black leadership of [Jean-Jacques Dessalines](#) declare the colony of [Saint-Domingue](#) independence of the [Haitian Declaration of Independence](#) as he renamed the country *Ayiti* meaning (Land of Mountains), [Haiti](#) became the world's [first black-led republic](#) in the New World, the first [Caribbean](#) state as well as the first [Latin American](#) country and the second oldest

independent nation in the [Western Hemisphere](#) after the United States to win independence from [Britain](#) in 1783.

The Spanish colonies won their independence in the first quarter of the 19th century, in the [Spanish American wars of independence](#). [Simón Bolívar](#) and [José de San Martín](#), among others, led their independence struggle. Although Bolivar attempted to keep the Spanish-speaking parts of Latin America politically allied, they rapidly became independent of one another as well, and several further wars were fought, such as the [Paraguayan War](#) and the [War of the Pacific](#). (See [Latin American integration](#).) In the Portuguese colony [Dom Pedro I](#) (also Pedro IV of Portugal), son of the Portuguese [king Dom João VI](#), proclaimed the country's independence in 1822 and became Brazil's first [Emperor](#). This was peacefully accepted by the crown in Portugal, upon compensation.

Effects of slavery

Slavery has had a significant role in the economic development of the [New World](#) after the colonization of the Americas by the Europeans. The [cotton](#), [tobacco](#), and [sugarcane](#) harvested by slaves became important exports for the United States and the Caribbean countries.

20th century

North America



A Canadian World War I recruiting poster (1914–1918)

As a part of the [British Empire](#), Canada immediately entered World War I when it broke out in 1914. Canada bore the brunt of several major battles during the early stages of the war, including the use of [poison gas](#) attacks at [Ypres](#). Losses became grave, and the government eventually brought in [conscription](#), despite the fact this was against the wishes of the majority of [French Canadians](#). In the ensuing [Conscription Crisis of 1917](#), riots broke out on the streets of [Montreal](#). In neighboring Newfoundland, the new dominion suffered a devastating loss on 1 July 1916, the [First day on the Somme](#).

The United States stayed out of the conflict [until 1917](#), when it joined the Entente powers. The United States was then able to play a crucial role at the [Paris Peace Conference of 1919](#) that shaped [interwar](#) Europe. Mexico was not part of the war, as the country was embroiled in the Mexican Revolution at the time.

The 1920s brought an age of great prosperity in the United States, and to a lesser degree Canada. But the [Wall Street crash of 1929](#) combined with [drought](#) ushered in a period of economic hardship in the United States and [Canada](#). From 1926 to 1929, there was a popular uprising against the anti-Catholic Mexican government of the time, set off specifically by the anti-clerical provisions of the [Mexican Constitution of 1917](#).

Once again, Canada found itself at war before its neighbors, with numerically modest but significant contributions overseas such as the Battle of Hong Kong and the Battle of Britain. The entry of the United States into the war helped to tip the balance in favour of the [allies](#). Two Mexican tankers, transporting oil to the United States, were attacked and sunk by the Germans in the [Gulf of Mexico](#) waters, in 1942. The incident happened in spite of Mexico's neutrality at that time. This led Mexico to enter the conflict with a declaration of war on the Axis nations. The destruction of Europe wrought by the war vaulted all North American countries to more important roles in world affairs, especially the United States, which emerged as a "[superpower](#)".

The early Cold War era saw the United States as the most powerful nation in a Western coalition of which Mexico and Canada were also a part. In Canada, Quebec was transformed by the [Quiet Revolution](#) and the emergence of [Quebec nationalism](#). Mexico experienced an era of huge economic growth after World War II, a heavy industrialization process and a growth of its middle class, a period known in Mexican history as "*El Milagro Mexicano*" (the Mexican miracle). The Caribbean saw the beginnings of [decolonization](#), while on the largest island the [Cuban Revolution](#) introduced Cold War rivalries into Latin America.





The [civil rights movement](#) in the U.S. ended [Jim Crow](#) and empowered black voters in the 1960s, which allowed black citizens to move into high government offices for the first time since Reconstruction. However, the dominant [New Deal coalition](#) collapsed in the mid-1960s in disputes over race and the [Vietnam War](#), and the conservative movement began its rise to power, as [the once dominant liberalism weakened and collapsed](#). Canada during this era was

dominated by the leadership of [Pierre Elliot Trudeau](#). In 1982, at the end of his tenure, Canada enshrined a new constitution.

Canada's [Brian Mulroney](#) not only ran on a similar platform but also favored closer trade ties with the United States. This led to the [Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement](#) in January 1989. Mexican presidents [Miguel de la Madrid](#), in the early 1980s and [Carlos Salinas de Gortari](#) in the late 1980s, started implementing liberal economic strategies that were seen as a good move. However, Mexico experienced a strong economic recession in 1982 and the Mexican peso suffered a devaluation. In the United States president [Ronald Reagan](#) attempted to move the United States back towards a hard anti-communist line in foreign affairs, in what his supporters saw as an attempt to assert moral leadership (compared to the Soviet Union) in the world community. Domestically, Reagan attempted to bring in a package of [privatization](#) and [regulation](#) to stimulate the economy.

The end of the Cold War and the beginning of the era of sustained economic expansion coincided during the 1990s. On 1 January 1994, Canada, Mexico and the United States signed the [North American Free Trade Agreement](#), creating the world's largest free trade area. In 2000, [Vicente Fox](#) became the first non-PRI candidate to win the Mexican presidency in over 70 years. The optimism of the 1990s was shattered by the [9/11](#) attacks of 2001 on the United States, which prompted military intervention in [Afghanistan](#), which also involved Canada. Canada did not support the United States' later move to [invade Iraq](#), however.

In the U.S. the [Reagan Era](#) of conservative national policies, deregulation and tax cuts took control with the election of [Ronald Reagan](#) in 1980. By 2010, political scientists were debating whether the election of [Barack Obama](#) in 2008 represented an end of the Reagan Era, or was only a reaction against the bubble economy of the 2000s (decade), which burst in 2008 and became the [Late-2000s recession](#) with prolonged unemployment.

Country or Territory with flag	Area (km ²) ^[39] (sq mi)	Population (2021 est.) ^{[40][41]}	Population density per km ² (per sq mi)	Capital
 Bermuda (United Kingdom)	54 km ² (21 sq mi)	64,185	1,189/km ² (3,079/sq mi)	Hamilton
 Canada	9,984,670 km ² (3,855,100 sq mi)	39,858,480	3.99/km ² (10.33/sq mi)	Ottawa
 Clipperton Island (France)	8.9 km ² (3.4 sq mi)	Uninhabited	0/km ² (0/sq mi)	N/A
 Greenland (Denmark)	2,166,086 km ² (836,330 sq mi)	56,583	0.026/km ² (0.067/sq mi)	Nuuk
 Mexico	1,972,550 km ² (761,610 sq mi)	129,875,529	65.8/km ² (170.4/sq mi)	Mexico City
 Saint Pierre and Miquelon (France)	242 km ² (93 sq mi)	6,008	24.8/km ² (64.2/sq mi)	Saint-Pierre
 United States	3,796,742 km ² (1,465,930 sq mi)	336,997,624	88.8/km ² (230/sq mi)	Washington, D.C.
Total	17,920,353 km ² (6,919,087 sq mi)	506,807,509	28.3/km ² (73.2/sq mi)	

Central America

Despite the failure of a lasting political union, the concept of [Central American reunification](#), though lacking enthusiasm from the leaders of the individual countries, rises from time to time. In 1856–1857 the region successfully established a military coalition to repel an invasion by United States adventurer [William Walker](#). Today, all five nations fly [flags](#) that retain the old federal motif of two outer blue bands bounding an inner white stripe. (Costa Rica, traditionally the least committed of the five to regional integration, modified its flag significantly in 1848 by darkening the blue and adding a double-wide inner red band, in honor of the French tricolor).

In 1907, a [Central American Court of Justice](#) was created. On 13 December 1960, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua established the [Central American Common Market](#) ("CACM"). Costa Rica, because of its relative economic prosperity and political stability, chose not to participate in the CACM. The goals for the CACM were to create greater political unification and success of [import substitution industrialization](#) policies. The project was an immediate

economic success, but was abandoned after the 1969 "[Football War](#)" between El Salvador and Honduras. A [Central American Parliament](#) has operated, as a purely advisory body, since 1991. Costa Rica has repeatedly declined invitations to join the regional parliament, which seats deputies from the four other former members of the Union, as well as from [Panama](#) and the [Dominican Republic](#).



Country or Territory with flag	Area (km ²) ^[39] (sq mi)	Population (2021 est.) ^{[40][41]}	Population density per km ² (per sq mi)	Capital
 Belize	22,970 km ² (8,870 sq mi)	441,471	19.22/km ² (49.78/sq mi)	Belmopan
 Costa Rica	51,100 km ² (19,700 sq mi)	5,044,197	98.7/km ² (255.6/sq mi)	San José
 El Salvador	21,041 km ² (8,124 sq mi)	6,602,370	314/km ² (813/sq mi)	San Salvador
 Guatemala	108,889 km ² (42,042 sq mi)	17,980,803	165/km ² (427/sq mi)	Guatemala City
 Honduras	112,492 km ² (43,433 sq mi)	9,571,352	85.1/km ² (220.4/sq mi)	Tegucigalpa
 Nicaragua	130,375 km ² (50,338 sq mi)	6,359,689	48.8/km ² (126.4/sq mi)	Managua
 Panama	75,417 km ² (29,119 sq mi)	4,337,768	57.5/km ² (148.9/sq mi)	Panama City
Total	522,284 km ² (201,655 sq mi)	50,337,650	96.4/km ² (249.6/sq mi)	

South America

In the 1960s and 1970s, the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay were overthrown or displaced by U.S.-aligned military dictatorships. These dictatorships detained tens of thousands of [political prisoners](#), many of whom were tortured and/or killed (on inter-state collaboration, see [Operation Condor](#)). Economically, they began a transition to [neoliberal](#) economic policies. They placed their own actions within the United States [Cold War](#) doctrine of "National Security" against internal subversion. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Peru suffered from an [internal conflict](#) (see [Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement](#) and [Shining Path](#)). Revolutionary movements and right-wing military dictatorships have been common, but starting

in the 1980s a wave of democratization came through the continent, and democratic rule is widespread now. Allegations of corruption remain common, and several nations have seen crises which have forced the resignation of their presidents, although normal civilian succession has continued.

[International indebtedness](#) became a notable problem, as most recently illustrated by [Argentina's default](#) in the early 21st century. In recent years, South American governments have drifted to the left, with [socialist](#) leaders being elected in Chile, [Bolivia](#), Brazil, [Venezuela](#), and a leftist president in Argentina and [Uruguay](#). Despite the move to the left, South America is still largely capitalist. With the founding of the [Union of South American Nations](#), South America has started down the road of economic integration, with plans for political integration in the [European Union](#) style.














Country or Territory with flag	Area (km ²) ^[39] (sq mi)	Population (2021 est.) ^{[40][41]}	Population density per km ² (per sq mi)	Capital
 Argentina	2,766,890 km ² (1,068,300 sq mi)	45,276,780	16.4/km ² (42.5/sq mi)	Buenos Aires
 Bolivia	1,098,580 km ² (424,160 sq mi)	12,079,472	11.0/km ² (28.5/sq mi)	Sucre; La Paz ^[42]
 Brazil	8,514,877 km ² (3,287,612 sq mi)	214,326,223	25.2/km ² (65.3/sq mi)	Brasília
 Chile ^[43]	756,950 km ² (292,260 sq mi)	19,493,184	25.8/km ² (66.8/sq mi)	Santiago
 Colombia	1,138,910 km ² (439,740 sq mi)	51,516,562	45.2/km ² (117.1/sq mi)	Bogotá
 Ecuador	283,560 km ² (109,480 sq mi)	17,797,737	62.8/km ² (162.7/sq mi)	Quito
 Falkland Islands (United Kingdom) ^[44]	12,173 km ² (4,700 sq mi)	3,398 ^[45]	0.28/km ² (0.73/sq mi)	Stanley
 French Guiana (France)	91,000 km ² (35,000 sq mi)	294,071 ^[46]	3.23/km ² (8.37/sq mi)	Cayenne
 Guyana	214,999 km ² (83,012 sq mi)	804,567	3.74/km ² (9.69/sq mi)	Georgetown
 Paraguay	406,750 km ² (157,050 sq mi)	6,831,306	16.8/km ² (43.5/sq mi)	Asunción
 Peru	1,285,220 km ² (496,230 sq mi)	33,715,471	26.2/km ² (67.9/sq mi)	Lima
 South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (United Kingdom) ^[47]	3,093 km ² (1,194 sq mi)	20	0.01/km ² (0.03/sq mi)	King Edward Point
 Suriname	163,270 km ² (63,040 sq mi)	612,985	3.75/km ² (9.71/sq mi)	Paramaribo
 Uruguay	176,220 km ² (68,040 sq mi)	3,477,780	19.7/km ² (51/sq mi)	Montevideo

Country or Territory with flag	Area (km ²) ^[39] (sq mi)	Population (2021 est.) ^{[40][41]}	Population density per km ² (per sq mi)	Capital
 Venezuela	916,445 km ² (353,841 sq mi)	28,199,867	30.8/km ² (79.8/sq mi)	Caracas
Total	17,828,937 km ² (6,883,791 sq mi)	434,429,423	24.4/km ² (63.2/sq mi)	

Caribbean

Throughout the 20th century, several island countries, such as [Jamaica](#) and [Barbados](#) gained independence from British rule. As a result, many of the English-speaking states and territories shifted their economies to tourism and offshore bank industries.

During the Cold War, the Caribbean has faced a series of military interventions from the United States, such as the [Banana Wars](#) and the [Cuban Missile Crisis](#).

Country or Territory with flag	Area (km ²) ^[39] (sq mi)	Population (2021 est.) ^{[40][41]}	Population density per km ² (per sq mi)	Capital
 Anguilla (United Kingdom)	102 km ² (39 sq mi)	15,753	154.4/km ² (399.9/sq mi)	The Valley
 Antigua and Barbuda	442 km ² (171 sq mi)	93,219	210.9/km ² (546.2/sq mi)	St. John's
 Aruba (Netherlands)	180 km ² (69 sq mi)	106,537	591.9/km ² (1,533/sq mi)	Oranjestad
 The Bahamas	13,943 km ² (5,383 sq mi)	407,906	29.3/km ² (75.9/sq mi)	Nassau
Bajo Nuevo Bank (United States / Colombia / Jamaica)	100 km ² (39 sq mi)	Uninhabited	0.0/km ² (0/sq mi)	N/A
 Barbados	430 km ² (170 sq mi)	287,025	667.5/km ² (1,729/sq mi)	Bridgetown
 Bonaire (Netherlands)	294 km ² (114 sq mi)	20,104	68.4/km ² (177.2/sq mi)	Kralendijk
 British Virgin Islands (United Kingdom)	151 km ² (58 sq mi)	31,122	206.1/km ² (533.8/sq mi)	Road Town
 Cayman Islands (United Kingdom)	264 km ² (102 sq mi)	68,136	258.1/km ² (668.5/sq mi)	George Town
 Cuba	109,886 km ² (42,427 sq mi)	11,256,372	102.4/km ² (265.2/sq mi)	Havana
 Curaçao (Netherlands)	444 km ² (171 sq mi)	190,338	428.7/km ² (1,110/sq mi)	Willemstad
 Dominica	751 km ² (290 sq mi)	72,412	96.4/km ² (249.7/sq mi)	Roseau
 Dominican Republic	48,671 km ² (18,792 sq mi)	11,117,873	228.4/km ² (591.6/sq mi)	Santo Domingo
 Federal Dependencies of Venezuela (Venezuela)	342 km ² (132 sq mi)	2,155	6.3/km ² (16.3/sq mi)	N/A
 Grenada	344 km ² (133 sq mi)	124,610	362.2/km ² (938.1/sq mi)	St. George's

Country or Territory with flag	Area (km ²) ^[39] (sq mi)	Population (2021 est.) ^{[40][41]}	Population density per km ² (per sq mi)	Capital
 Guadeloupe (France)	1,620 km ² (630 sq mi)	396,051	244.5/km ² (633.3/sq mi)	Basse-Terre
 Haiti	27,750 km ² (10,710 sq mi)	11,447,569	412.5/km ² (1,068/sq mi)	Port-au-Prince
 Jamaica	10,991 km ² (4,244 sq mi)	2,827,695	257.3/km ² (666.4/sq mi)	Kingston
 Martinique (France)	1,128 km ² (436 sq mi)	368,796	326.9/km ² (846.7/sq mi)	Fort-de-France
 Montserrat (United Kingdom)	102 km ² (39 sq mi)	4,417	43.3/km ² (112.1/sq mi)	Plymouth; Brades
Navassa Island (United States / Haiti)	5 km ² (1.9 sq mi)	Uninhabited	0.0/km ² (0/sq mi)	Lulu Town
 Puerto Rico (United States)	8,870 km ² (3,420 sq mi)	3,256,028	367.1/km ² (950.8/sq mi)	San Juan
 Saba (Netherlands)	13 km ² (5.0 sq mi)	1,537	118.2/km ² (306.1/sq mi)	The Bottom
 Saint Barthélemy (France)	21 km ² (8.1 sq mi)	7,448	354.7/km ² (918.7/sq mi)	Gustavia
 Saint Kitts and Nevis	261 km ² (101 sq mi)	47,606	182.4/km ² (472.4/sq mi)	Basseterre
 Saint Lucia	539 km ² (208 sq mi)	179,651	333.3/km ² (863.2/sq mi)	Castries
 Saint Martin (France)	54 km ² (21 sq mi)	29,820	552.2/km ² (1,430/sq mi)	Marigot
 Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	389 km ² (150 sq mi)	104,332	268.2/km ² (694.6/sq mi)	Kingstown
Serranilla Bank (United States / Colombia / Honduras)	100 km ² (39 sq mi)	Uninhabited	0.0/km ² (0/sq mi)	N/A
 Sint Eustatius (Netherlands)	21 km ² (8.1 sq mi)	2,739	130.4/km ² (337.7/sq mi)	Oranjestad

Country or Territory with flag	Area (km ²) ^[39] (sq mi)	Population (2021 est.) ^{[40][41]}	Population density per km ² (per sq mi)	Capital
 Sint Maarten (Netherlands)	34 km ² (13 sq mi)	44,042	1,296/km ² (3,357/sq mi)	Philipsburg
 Trinidad and Tobago	5,130 km ² (1,980 sq mi)	1,525,663	297.4/km ² (770.3/sq mi)	Port of Spain
 Turks and Caicos Islands (United Kingdom)	948 km ² (366 sq mi)	45,144	47.6/km ² (123.3/sq mi)	Cockburn Town
 United States Virgin Islands (United States)	347 km ² (134 sq mi)	100,091	288.4/km ² (747.1/sq mi)	Charlotte Amalie
Total	234,667 km ² (90,605 sq mi)	44,182,191	188.3/km ² (487.6/sq mi)	

See also

 [History portal](#)

 [Latin America portal](#)

 [Indigenous peoples of the Americas portal](#)

- [History of Latin America–United States relations](#)
- [History of the west coast of North America](#)
- [History of Latin America](#)
- [History of the Southern United States](#)
- [American frontier](#)
- [History of New England](#)
- [List of conflicts in The Americas](#)
- [Spanish Empire](#)
- [Portuguese Empire](#)
- [List of oldest buildings in the Americas](#)

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